Interview with Michael A. Samuels

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR MICHAEL A. SAMUELS

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[This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Samuels]

Q: This is an interview with Ambassador Michael A. Samuels. If you would like to give a summary of your career?

SAMUELS: I first entered the State Department in the fall of 1970 as a congressional relations officer. At the time the Office of Congressional Relations was short staffed and my responsibilities included the Latin American Bureau, the African Bureau, the then Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, and a variety of specific problems such as Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and tuna problems that existed between primarily Ecuador and Peru on the one hand and the US on the other hand. My job was to try to monitor what was going on in Congress and provide the liaison with the key substantive officers in the Department.

Then in January, 1972, with the second Nixon Administration, I moved on to be executive assistant to the new Deputy Secretary of State, Kenneth Rush. He outlasted Secretary Rogers for approximately ten months before he went into the White House in the last several months of the Nixon Administration. I went with him for a couple of months.

About that time it was decided that I would be at age 34 nominated to be Ambassador to Sierra Leone. That was in May, 1974. The actual nomination didn't come until December, 1974. The time I spent in the White House was between May and July, 1974. After that period I returned to the Department and spent some time helping Rush's replacement, Bob Ingersoll, as Deputy Secretary. And then I spent a few months in the Office of Policy Planning, largely working on Portuguese and Portuguese African related matters.

I early 1975, after my confirmation, I went off as Ambassador to Sierra Leone, where I stayed until mid-1977.

Then I left government. My next entry into government service was as Deputy US Trade Representative and Ambassador to the GATT from early 1986 to mid-1989.

Q: First, to give the researcher some fuel, could you give me something about your background—where you grew up and were educated, etc.?

SAMUELS: I grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, a son of a jeweler. Neither mother nor father had been to college. The family had been in the United States for two generations with the exception of one quarter which goes back to the revolutionary era. The family had lived in Youngstown for a couple of generations or longer. I went to public high school; to Yale as an undergraduate...

Q: What were you majoring in at Yale?

SAMUELS: It varied from year to year, but eventually I majored in American Studies.

From Yale I decided I wanted to go to Africa which was becoming independent about my junior, senior year. I graduated in 1961. I was interested in the history being made in my life time and I saw that being in Africa. So I got interested in going to Africa to teach. Yale at the time had a program called, “Yale Men Abroad” where they tried to assist people like me who wanted to go abroad and teach, particularly in Africa. The program I think

was funded by the Hershey people with an interest in getting Americans to teach in cocoa producing countries. I think the countries they had in mind were Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana and Nigeria.

I chose Ghana and, in their wisdom, the Ghanaians under Nkrumah decided that my Yale degree was insufficient to allow me to teach in their school system, so I graduated from Yale in 1961 not knowing what I was going to be doing thereafter.

In a very short period of time, I managed to get accepted in a new program that Columbia University Teachers College had developed. Its purpose was to try to address the skepticism that was sometimes found in newly independent Africa about the capability of US graduates to teach in schools. It was a program that had me study for eight months at Columbia Teachers College and then five months in England to get a Masters Degree and class room experience in the British educational system.

I was hired by the government of Northern Nigeria while I was in England and went there in mid-1962 and taught in a private boys boarding school in very rural Nigeria, where 95% of my students were the sons of subsistence farmers. I taught there from 1962-64. It was a wonderful experience.

Q: We are trying to grab the perceptions of various countries at various times, this was up in the Moslem area wasn't it?

SAMUELS: No, actually it wasn't. It was in the area known as the Middle Belt. I taught amongst a tribe called the Tiv. The students were largely from the tribes of the Tiv, the Idoma, Juken, the Chamba, and a few Moslem Hausa and Fulani. At least two-thirds were Tiv. This was a group that was largely of animist roots, or else they had been Christianized. They were the minority in a largely Moslem region of Nigeria. It was an area where there had been constant tension. Where I was is now (1991) a state called Benue State.

Q: What was your impression of developments there? The British has left just a short time before and Nigeria was considered one of their star colonies I believe at the time. You had sort of a unique view there. How did you find the situation in Nigeria, where you were?

SAMUELS: There was still quite a sign of British presence where I was. The principal of the school was British. A number of the administrative officers were British. The numbers of local Nigerians capable of serving in a number of slots were minimal. To the extent that there were Nigerians available even to teach, they were, at least at the kind of school I was at, not from the North, clearly not from the area where the school was located. There were questions of allegiance even in the neighboring area around the school. In fact, the Tiv, the people within whose area the school was located, probably had spent several decades not accepting allegiance to anybody. They are not that type of people. There were numerous problems of security that the government of Nigeria and the government of Northern Nigeria had trouble with.

Q: What was your impression when you left, wither Nigeria at that time?

SAMUELS: I had none. This was only a couple of years before the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. The place where I was located was right on the edge of the North, fringing on Ibo land where there was constant demographic pressure of northern Tivs moving south and southern Ibos moving north. There were tensions, but I don't think I could have predicted a civil war.

Q: Then you...

SAMUELS: Then I came back and went on to graduate school at Columbia. I decided that I wanted to specialize in Portuguese Africa. I went to Lisbon to learn Portuguese. Then, after my class work was over, I got a grant to do doctoral research and in 1966-67 I went off to Portugal and Angola to do my doctoral research. I completed the writing in 1968, published a few articles and was hired by a man named David Abshire who ran something

called the Center for Strategic Studies, which was at the time affiliated with Georgetown University.

He was doing a book on Portuguese Africa, saw something I had written on that area and asked me to come and assess the work they had done. In the course of some informal work I did for him as a graduate student he asked me to come down and work on his book and start a program at the Georgetown Center related to Africa.

I spent the time from June, 1968 to the fall of 1970 at the Center for Strategic Studies (subsequently it became the Center for Strategic and International Studies) as their Director of African Programs.

It was, in fact, the relationship with Abshire that led me to go into the State Department. Earlier in 1970, Abshire had been made Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, and I was the one person from CSIS whom he took with him into the State Department.

Q: Before we move to that, I wonder if you could tell us a little about Portuguese Africa. It is not shown as a prime example of colonial efficiency, at least by word of mouth reputation. How did you find it looking at the situation at the time?

SAMUELS: I am uncomfortable with people comparing one country's colonial activities with another country's colonial activities. I have both studied enough and traveled enough in Africa to realize that colonialism in itself carries with it both negatives and positives. There were aspects of Portuguese colonialism which were considerably better than ones found in other parts of Africa, and there were aspects of Portuguese colonialism which were considerably worse than in other parts of Africa.

What was better? Well, in Angola they set up a whole bunch of different towns, they didn't centralize everything in one big capital. Because the Portuguese settled as if it were their own country, they built little hotels and restaurants, built roads that connected them (their

road structure was probably better than most African countries at independence), their railroad system equaled that of others.

Negatively? They probably had a higher level of racial consciousness then most countries even though they reacted in a less racially conscious way. In certain ways the atmosphere was always charged racially in ways I didn't find in other parts of Africa. They were poorer than most of the other colonial countries and therefore they were able to do less. Their schooling was less. But then Portugal was a very religious country and there was less missionarizing because the Portuguese didn't produce their own padres to go off to Africa. They were always skeptical about foreign missionaries because they would bring foreign influences and they were concerned about those foreign influences. They were just different. I hesitate to say better or worse.

Q: You came into Congressional Relations in late 1970. You had Africa, Latin America, and what else?

SAMUELS: Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, which was subsequently ended when a lot of the activities were sent over to USIA. I did Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and tuna problems, which were quite serious at times.

Q: What about the tuna problem? You had a very strong lobby in California of the tuna fishermen who had a lot of clout in Congress. The problem was over a fishing zone wasn't it?

SAMUELS: The problem was that a lot of what we now recognize as rights under the Law of the Sea Agreement, didn't exist then. There was a question of what those rights were. The problem was that the way tuna fish travel brings them in and out of various countries' economic zones. They aren't in a stable location. There is a separate set of laws or understandings related to that particular type of fish. Frequently the fish would go from non-territorial waters into territorial waters.

Ecuador and Peru would, from time to time, sometimes for economic reasons, sometimes for political reasons, capture one of our vessels. That would lead to pressures on the government by those in Congress who represented the owners of those vessels. The interplay of those domestic interests had economic roots, and the foreign policy ones were....

Q: What was the State Department's stand on this?

SAMUELS: The tendency of the State Department was to try to treat the domestic interests as if they were minor.

Q: As the spokesman for this kind of thing over in Congress, what sort of reception did you get?

SAMUELS: Congressmen used to try to down play anything I said. There was a tendency of many in Congress to view any representative of the State Department as a kind of a cookie cutter, three piece suit, out-of-touch-with-the-American-people type of person.

Q: Do you think that the State Department under David Abshire was trying to work around or do something about this, to use a modern term, interface between the State Department and Congress which has always been considered a problem?

SAMUELS: Well, in general terms, I think Abshire was very conscious about this issue and went out of his way to try to involve Congress increasingly in an understanding of what the Administration's approach to foreign policy was. In fact, I would say that, as a result of his own experiences as Assistant Secretary, Abshire significantly changed his own career. Not that it changed in terms of where he was located, but, when he left the Department and went back to CSIS, its programs took on a decidedly congressionally-oriented direction. He became aware of the need for much closer communication between Executive and Legislative Branches, addressing the substance of foreign policy problems, because he found, I think, that there often was a different perspective on the same events

depending on whether one spoke from the Executive or Legislative Branch. And those different perspectives often led to calls for different kinds of actions. He felt that undercut national interests. He did what he could while he was in the Department and those of us who were with him tried the same thing. But sometimes it was not that easy to do.

Q: Was there a difference in dealing with the professional staff of Congress than the Senators and Congressmen themselves? This was a period when the congressional staffs were beginning to grow at a considerable rate. Did you find that they had their own agenda?

SAMUELS: Sure, staffs always have their own agendas, but back in those days the staff had really not yet begun to grow. It was just before the massive growth in congressional staffs. There were more direct links between the interests of the members and the activities of their staffs.

I would say that probably the major activity that was taking place in the office during that period was an activity that I was only minimally connected with. That was activity related to the Vietnam war. There were a variety of things with Senators Fulbright, Javits, Cooper and Church that I was not directly involved with; that is what I would say took the major amount of attention of someone like Abshire.

Q: Did you find that the Vietnam business, you can almost say the poison between Congress and the executive body was spilt over into other affairs so that other State Department views were lessened or weakened because of this?

SAMUELS: I think probably so. I think it is fair to say, if I may generalize, that when there is tension on one major issue between the Executive and Legislative Branches, it is very hard to work other issues and try to get them seen on their merits. It can be done, but frequently it requires an important advocate for whatever the issue is in one or both Houses. It is even hard, sometimes, for the Executive Branch, itself, to carry issues that

are of medium importance when it is focusing on issues of tremendous importance. This is particularly true of the White House.

Q: Did you have the feeling when you were doing this that in some ways representing the State Department over there that you were not carrying as much weight as say the National Security Council under Henry Kissinger? Did you have much to do with the National Security Council?

SAMUELS: Sometimes, yes. On issues where the National Security Council wanted to jump in, it was more likely to be listened to than the State Department. On the other hand, the tendency was that there was coordination. I think Abshire went out of his way to see to it that there was coordination. He spent a good portion of his time at the White House. Coordination was important. It was more often that you would get Kissinger undercutting the State Department at the Kissinger vs. Rogers level rather than at the level that I had to function.

One of the issues which I was most active in during this period of time was the issue related to sanctions on Rhodesia.

Q: This was when there was a white government under Ian Smith in Rhodesia and there was an effort on the part of the United States and other countries to isolate it.

SAMUELS: Yes, it was during that period. But it is unclear whether there was an effort on the part of the United States to isolate it or whether there was an effort on the part of some people in the United States to isolate it. In fact, for a long period of time the US was unwilling to go along with the effort that one found in other parts of the world to put sanctions on the government of Ian Smith in Rhodesia. Eventually there was a congressional effort to put such sanctions on. Subsequently there were congressional efforts to eliminate those sanctions.

It was on this issue where I personally encountered the greatest problem of mixed signals between different parts of the Administration. At the time, probably somewhere in 1972, when there was an effort by then Senator Harry Byrd from Virginia to try to eliminate or weaken the sanctions that had been congressionally mandated, somewhat for substantive reasons and perhaps more for political reasons, the White House was providing quiet support to Byrd while the State Department was working all out or at least hard to try to defeat Byrd. The reason I quibbled over the wording was because often I was the senior person in the State Department working to defeat Senator Byrd and the Byrd Amendment, and that (the level of which the Administration's support was being pursued) was a clear signal to those on the Hill. Abshire spent little time involved in this, for example. Had the Administration really cared about it, Abshire would have been more directly involved.

Q: What was the outcome?

SAMUELS: Senator Byrd won. It was connected with his own relationship with many of his colleagues, not only as a result of the substantive issues involved. But that is a different subject.

Q: You then were moved from Congressional Relations to being special assistant to Rush. What was his position and what were you doing?

SAMUELS: Kenneth Rush...who by the way if you haven't interviewed him I strongly recommend that you do.

Q: I will.

SAMUELS: He is now living in Florida, retired. I think he would be honored, and you would find some of the things he had to say about Nixon, Kissinger, Rogers, fascinating.

He had been Nixon's law professor at Duke. Then he went on to become President of Union Carbide. When Nixon became President he made Rush Ambassador to Germany

where he, among other things, negotiated the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin. In approximately 1971 he returned to be Deputy Secretary of Defense and, with the new Administration, because Deputy Secretary of State thinking that some time in the new Administration he would become Secretary of State. He was Deputy under Rogers and stayed under Kissinger, obviously disappointed but not sharing with others his disappointment.

Q: How did you view Kenneth Rush's method of operations and his significance within the State Department?

SAMUELS: Rush was a very bright man but in the government's bureaucratic cauldron, he rarely chose to exercise the power and authority that could have been his and which he was used to exercise in other positions. I think that the bureaucracy frustrated him and to some extent awed him. He saw his role as Deputy as being a deputy. He tried to support Rogers and subsequently Kissinger. He rarely chose to rock the boat with either of them. He, particularly during the Kissinger era, spent a good deal of his time letting other parts of the Department feel as if someone on the 7th floor, where the Secretary and Deputy Secretary and most senior officers had their offices, cared about their issues, that they had an ear for their voices. So a good deal of what he did was to listen to parts of the Department that were peripheral in Kissinger's way of operating. He also supervised both political and career appointments actively.

Q: How did you feel from your perspective when Rogers was supplanted by Henry Kissinger? How was the atmosphere?

SAMUELS: First of all I think it is important to note that I was the one political, non-career staff person on Rush's staff. The other people were all parts of the career system. It was clear that there was no love lost between Kissinger and Rogers. That relationship predated the time when Rogers was supplanted by Kissinger. Rush spent a good deal of his time trying not to burn his bridges with either. Not an easy task, frankly. I think that Kissinger's

coming to the Department brought with it a sense of greater involvement in a higher level of substance, but at the same time Kissinger was known to rely on a small number of people, and so there was some resentment on the part of many that they were really out of touch with the mainstream of what was going on. Kissinger was much tougher on staff, even tougher on staff publicly, than Rogers was. But one of the great things about Kissinger, I must say, is that he did have most of his meetings transcribed. When they are declassified, as I hope they will be sooner rather than later, to the extent they haven't been already, it will be a pleasure for historians to write history.

Q: Did you find that you were having to scramble with Kissinger staff to keep Rush plugged into the system? There is always the problem that when you have a dynamic person such as Kissinger, the deputies often get overlooked.

SAMUELS: I think there was a bit of that. Rush saw most of the documents that were relevant and most actions, so he was kept abreast of most things. Part of my job was to keep my finger on what was happening to make sure he was seeing what he needed to see. You know, Kissinger was a very secretive guy. I think Rush managed to stay on top of things, but it was a very frustrating job, and a bit of a thankless job, I have to tell you.

Q: I would imagine it would be.

SAMUELS: Well, you see, Kissinger's style was to denigrate others, sometimes with humor and sometimes not. He couldn't do that with Rush. Rush was after all senior to him. It was hard to tell what Rush's personal relation to Nixon could be at the snap of a finger, because it predated everybody else's friendship with Nixon. Therefore, Kissinger had to deal carefully with Rush, and I think he did. At times we got into silly kinds of things like which of the two of them would be the last to enter the room. Kissinger had the habit of calling a meeting at a certain time and arriving 15 minutes late. Rush wasn't used to sitting around waiting for anybody. After a while part of my job was to stand out in the hallway

and see when Kissinger would leave his room and only then would Rush come down. That is the kind of things a staff person did.

Q: Were there any issues that Rush was particularly involved in? You have mentioned keeping the other parts of the Department aware of issues and making them feel part of the mainstream.

SAMUELS: There were three that I think Rush was particularly involved with at the time. Subsequently, all three of them went on to become very important national issues. They were ones that Kissinger assigned Rush to nurture. At the time there was an institution called the Under Secretaries Committee comprised of Under Secretaries or in some cases, such as in State and Defense, Deputy Secretaries. It was an interagency process that existed parallel to the NSC operation because they tended to address longer-term issues.

The three that emerged during this period were the Law of the Sea, negotiations for the Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) negotiations between East and West. Those three issues all took their earliest shape under Rush's supervision as chairman of the Under Secretaries Committee.

Q: We never did ratify the Law of the Sea did we?

SAMUELS: I don't think so. The issue over which that floundered, if I am not mistaken, had to do with commercial rights for undersea mining. My sense is that this was not viewed as a major issue back in those days in the early '70s.

Q: It may have been that the technology wasn't such that it made it much of an issue.

SAMUELS: I think that probably is true. The technology that subsequently became relevant to this was a technology that at the time was used by the CIA to raise submarines.

Q: The CSCE subsequently became the Helsinki Accords. In a previous interview I did with George Vest he talked about Kissinger who, when he was in the National Security Council, before he became Secretary of State, was continually undercutting that whole process because he really wasn't interest in it. He was sort of knocking the negotiating to the Soviets in order to push his own arms negotiations.

SAMUELS: That is true and probably why it ended up being part of the Under Secretaries Committee rather than being part of the more central NSC structure. The reason I identify this is because, if you look in historical terms at how things emerge, it is important to focus on the early days when the seeds were germinating, and the place they germinated was in the less-important to-Kissinger Under Secretaries Committee where these three items were all relegated, because Kissinger couldn't care less about any of them.

Q: You then went into Policy Planning for a little while?

SAMUELS: After going to the White House with Rush.

Q: Oh, you went to the White House.

SAMUELS: You see the story of this is probably not fully written, but Rush was asked to go to the White House in May, 1974. It was probably not the first time he was asked to go to the White House. In May, 1974 Nixon was under tremendous pressure over Watergate. Al Haig was in the eyes of some even running the government. There was at the time a major conflict between two members of the Cabinet. Roy Ash, who was the Head of the Office of Management and Budget, and Bill Simon, who was Secretary of Treasury. They disliked each other immensely. When things were calmer in the White House, Haig could referee that battle satisfactorily, but he was losing his ability to spend enough time to do so and he needed someone with some seniority and credibility to come over to the White House to help referee that battle.

They asked Rush if he would do it. He agreed and went over to the White House with a Cabinet level rank of Counselor for International Economic Policy, and I agreed to go over with him to get him settled and a staff in the West Wing of the White House.

In the course of his making that decision and departing from the State Department, he had a conversation with Kissinger at which they decided that they would ask me if I wanted to be an ambassador. At age 34 I was taken by surprise, but was pleased and said that indeed I would like to be an ambassador. The number of potential places where I might be ambassador was reduced to two, Ghana and Sierra Leone. Ghana had already been promised to Shirley Temple Black, but there was a question as to whether she would take it. She did, and I became the candidate to be ambassador to Sierra Leone. This decision was made as early as May, 1974 but wasn't announced until December.

After I went to the White House with Rush for a couple of months, I came back in July, 1974 and worked for a period of time with Bob Ingersoll and later, while waiting for my nomination to come through formally, I worked on the Policy Planning Staff and did a few specific tasks.

Q: Did you have the feeling when Rush left that he really wanted to get out from underneath Kissinger at that point?

SAMUELS: Not particularly. I think he felt that he was doing something for Nixon.

Q: What was the feeling at the time dealing with foreign affairs but seeing the Watergate thing starting to spread? Was this inhibiting or a problem at the policy level?

SAMUELS: I don't trust my answer to this question. My own view is that clearly the nation was reeling, not just over Watergate but also over Vietnam. I am not sure which of the two had a greater negative impact on the conduct of foreign policy, but the two of them together so dominated the mainstream of what was happening in the United States related to both the conduct of the Presidency and with it other aspects of the Executive Branch

automatically. And, with the relationship between the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch that developed over Vietnam, the US Government was not functioning well. But at times that had little effect at all on the conduct of foreign diplomacy.

Q: I was overseas in Greece at the time and nobody understood it and frankly we didn't really feel much impact. Life just went on.

You mention that you were 34 when nominated as Ambassador to Sierra Leone. Was there any problem due to your age in getting confirmed? Obviously you had a much better track record in African affairs than many of the career people.

SAMUELS: There was no problem getting confirmed. The Foreign Service Association formally filed an opposition to my nomination based on the fact that “there were Foreign Service officers as qualified as I.” But that was, I am convinced, kind of perfunctory. At the time it was unusual to have an ambassador in his 30s, but subsequently nominating younger officers has been more frequent, even with career people. I think the personnel system has come to realize that in a number of countries it was probably better to have a young, dynamic ambassador than to have an ambassador who was going to retire at his next assignment, because in order to do some of the jobs well, it is physically difficult.

Q: It really started in the Gulf States where we started picking people in the mid-ranks.

SAMUELS: It use to be that if you were an ambassador you had to go on to some kind of very senior job, but they came to realize that you could take a mid-level next job.

Q: When you went out there what did you see?

SAMUELS: Before you ask that, I think it would be productive to pursue another line of question because there were several things I did while I was on the Policy Planning Staff that are worth, if nothing else, footnotes of history.

Q: All right.

SAMUELS: I did three things in particular that are worth noting. These things may all be lost in history. One was a study of the independence movements in the Azores.

Q: I don't think I ever heard of that.

SAMUELS: In April 1974 there was a revolution in Portugal that ended the kind of ho hum way the rest of the world looked at Portugal, what Portugal was doing in the world and their own relations with Portugal.

The three things that I did that I found most fascinating while on the Policy Planning Staff all resulted from the affects of that revolution in Portugal.

Q: This was when the Salazar and...?

SAMUELS: The Caetano government was overthrown by a kind of lieutenant level military people, some of whom were very far left of center and frankly viewed by Kissinger as “reds”. That affected some of the things that I did.

The three things were 1) the study of the Azores independence groups, 2) an assessment of what would happen if Angola became independent and whether it would stick together as one country, and 3) I was part of a small team of Washington-based State Department people that made a special trip in October, 1974 to Portugal in order to assess the nature of the political forces in Portugal and privately to assess the capability of our Embassy there.

Q: I have picked this up in other places. Was this the old Embassy as opposed to the new Embassy?

SAMUELS: It was, I guess, the old Embassy.

Q: When I talk about the old Embassy I am talking about the staff. Who was the ambassador there?

SAMUELS: The Ambassador then was a guy by the name of Stuart Scott. Our report eventually led to his replacement by Frank Carlucci. That itself is one of the phenomenal, fascinating vignettes in American diplomatic history. Not of great importance, but an interesting one.

The trip that went out was the Lukens mission. It was headed by a guy named Al Lukens, who was at the time Director of Spanish and Portuguese Affairs in the European Bureau and I think subsequently went on to be ambassador in one or more African countries. The other two people on the trip also became ambassadors subsequently. One was Pete de Vos, who may even still be ambassador in some Portuguese speaking African country. And the other was Robert Ryan, who was later Ambassador in Mali, from the economic cone.

Q: What did you find?

SAMUELS: Let me go about answering your question in a different way to make it even more fascinating. I was uniquely qualified to do this because not only was I a Portuguese speaking outsider, not connected with State Department experiences, predated them, but also because I had been deeply involved with the appointment of Stuart Scott as Ambassador during the period when I was Rush's assistant. One of my jobs as executive assistant was to handle political appointees. The story goes back into early 1973, I think, with Jack Stevenson having announced his intention to resign as Legal Advisor of the State Department and the desire on the part of one of his deputies, Charlie Brower, to replace him. The feeling on the part of Secretary Rogers and those directly beneath him, who at the time were Rush, Bill Casey, Under Secretary for Economic Affairs...

Q: Later head of CIA.

SAMUELS: ...and Bill Porter who was Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the time. The desire was clearly not to promote Brower. I am not sure if there were substantive reasons for it, but what they decided was that they were going to do a search and try to find someone who had a lot of experience outside of government in international law and who looked senior. One of Charlie Brower's “shortcomings” was that he looked younger than his years. A nice substantive judgmental call by those in power!! But they wanted a gray hair.

So Casey, who had had a career in New York, was given the task of running a search. He reduced the field to two or three candidates who were then brought to Rush for his review prior to some recommendation and perhaps interview by Rogers. I will never forget Stuart Scott coming in. Here was a man...I don't remember his age at the time but he had to be at least in his mid- sixties; he clearly looked ten years older than that. My job used to be to chat with people prior to their going in to see Rush to get a feel for them. After their one on one with Rush, I would go in and chat with Rush and get his views and share mine with him. I remember very clearly Scott's interview in ways that I probably remember no others. It was a unique one. I remember Rush saying to me, “Well, what do you think of him?” I said, “I am really glad he came out.” And Rush said, “What do you mean?” I said, “I thought he would die in your office.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “I thought he was feeble.” And he said, “Well, fine.” He didn't find him that way.

Well, anyhow, Scott was selected as the candidate whom the search team would recommend to Rogers to be Legal Advisor to replace Jack Stevenson. Rogers accepted that recommendation. It may be that Rogers knew him beforehand, but I don't know that; I suspect he did. So, they told Scott that he was their candidate, they would have to run a security check on him. Scott took them for their word. These were, after all, honorable men. He closed up his affairs at his law firm, closed up his affairs in New York, moved down to Washington.

Meanwhile, his appointment was not announced. The security check was still going on. He started coming into the Department. Obviously he couldn't function as Legal Advisor. He didn't have access to a whole bunch of things, but they gave him a small office to settle in, and he became a frequent corridor person waiting for his appointment to be announced. He must have been in that stance for a number of months.

When Kissinger was made Secretary of State, one of the first things he did was to appoint his own lawyer, Carlton Maw, as Legal Advisor. Basically he said that he was not going to appoint this friend of Rogers as Legal Advisor because it was too important a job.

Well, of course, Stuart Scott had not been a friend of Rogers. He had been the result of a selection process that involved people who were going to be underneath Kissinger at the State Department. So when I learned this I went to Rush and said, “You know you have a problem on your hands. You were part of the team that gave this guy the feeling that he was going to come down here and be Legal Advisor. Now he doesn't have a job, he doesn't have a home in New York, he is down here.” Rush said, “What shall we do with him?” I said that I felt he had to do something, perhaps give him an embassy.

Rush raised it with Kissinger whose reaction was that he was not going to do anything for a friend of Rogers. Rush, to his credit, said, “You have this obligation. This guy was selected by Casey and me.” Kissinger said, “Okay, for you I will do this favor. Pick some place that is not very important where if he screws things up it won't make any difference.”

My job was to find such a place. There weren't many of them around. Portugal was chosen. And so Scott goes off in late 1973 as Ambassador to Portugal where he is in April, 1974, apparently over his head. But more importantly, regardless of what his views were, he is automatically discredited in the eyes of Kissinger from the very beginning because of the way in which he got to Portugal. So we already have sitting in Lisbon, I think in fact he was not in Lisbon when the coup took place...but we have sitting as Ambassador

someone who has no credibility with Kissinger. At the same time we have a DCM there who is viewed as an Africaphile and a “softy”.

Regardless, therefore, of the substance that the Embassy had been producing, Kissinger wasn't paying any attention to it. And furthermore, the nature of the revolution in Portugal was one where there were a number of contending forces, some of whom were very left wing—they may even have been communists. There was an opening very far left of center. There was the fear of whether Portugal could sit at the table at NATO because of the fear of communism. In fact, one of the things that led us to develop the idea of the Lukens mission was an effort to try to convince Kissinger there was some hope in Portugal so that he wouldn't just write off Portugal and a number of players in the Portuguese process.

Kissinger was unwilling even to meet with some of the leading figures on the Portuguese scene, because he didn't think Portugal would evolve in a way that would be sympathetic to our interests. So our task was to go out there and try to get reports that were credible, each of us having had experiences with Portugal in different ways and with different people.

In fact, our Embassy had minimal contacts with the new government. The reporting was not very sound. The access was not very good. Those of us who went out there on the Lukens mission tried to utilize our own contacts to develop reports and basically to come back to try to get Kissinger to look at Portugal with new eyes and at the same time confirm to the system that we had to make some changes in the Embassy staff.

Q: What did you find in Portugal? You went out with a Secretary of State who had a prejudged idea of where it was going. Did you feel you were under certain reins?

SAMUELS: No, quite to the contrary. We had free rein. We were to come up with our own views. That was the purpose of our trip. The purpose of our trip was to speak it the way we saw it. Basically we argued, if I remember correctly, that there were forces in the

Portuguese politique that were both democratic and non- and anti-communist and that it was not a foregone conclusion that those forces would lose. Therefore, there needed to develop a variety of programs and involvement that would try to encourage the victory of those forces over the forces of reactionary communism.

Q: As I recall it one of the sort of classics in modern diplomacy was when Carlucci went there. He had very strong opinions of his own and he and Kissinger did not see eye to eye on the situation.

SAMUELS: I wasn't privy to any of that. I had gone off to Sierra Leone by that time. So I can't give you a sense of that. It is clear that many in Portugal even today view Carlucci as a savior. On the other hand, there are also many in Portugal who fear that Carlucci was too much in bed with the Socialists and therefore did not do enough to support right of center activities. Carlucci would have his own views on what he did and why he did it. I have to believe that the way in which Portugal came out of things shows that a number of people did a lot of good things at that time. They weren't all Americans.

Many of the kinds of things that had to be done there were kinds of things that the US was not capable of doing. In fact, one of the effects of that era on me was to cause me to be a believer that one of the shortcomings of US programs at the time was our inability to support political activities and political development overtly. We were still saddled with the view that political development programs were to be the covert function of the CIA. Only subsequently, during the Reagan Administration, did we develop the credibility of that kind of activity and package it into what has since become the National Endowment for Democracy. That is an effort in which I was very supportive and even wrote about the need for even before the Reagan people came into power, while I was at CSIS a second time.

Q: Well, what about this Azores independence movement? I have never heard of that before. Was it a serious matter?

SAMUELS: Well, I don't remember about it very well except to know that there were a couple of Azores parties, at least one of which was independence minded. It was important for us to think about that. There may even have been a situation where we might have wanted to advocate that. The US base in the Azores was then of vital importance. It had been utilized prior to the Portuguese revolution at our own initiative without approval of the Portuguese during the Yom Kippur war in 1973 in the Middle East. We believed that we needed unencumbered access to and through that base because of the Middle East situation. If we would have found a government in Portugal with which we couldn't deal, I believe that consideration would have been given to advocating an Azores independence or association with the US in some way. After all...this is not a very significant statistic that I will give you, but it is true that more Azorean people live in the United States than live in the Azores.

Q: We have the nucleus of getting something going.

SAMUELS: That's right. I suspect that the report I did had no effect on anything, but at least it was done.

Q: One does these things and you can't tell what might happen.

SAMUELS: That's right.

Q: Here we go again. Today is November 6, 1991 and this is a continued interview with Mike Samuels. Mike, why don't we start with Sierra Leone? You were Ambassador there from 1975 to 1977. How did you get the appointment?

SAMUELS: I suspect the fairest way to describe it is that it was a recognition of the performance that I had put in in my previous position as executive assistant to the Deputy Secretary, and an awareness that I was an African specialist in the context of the movement of the then Deputy Secretary Rush to a Cabinet level position in the White House. Rush and Kissinger made a decision that I should be offered an ambassadorial

position and Sierra Leone on review seemed to be the most appropriate place. In effect, that is how I got it.

An interesting little vignette concerning the pace at which it came through. The decision to offer me the post was made in May, 1974. The nomination was not made until December, 1974. A lot of things could explain the delay, but the key factor was that my predecessor had been, if I am not mistaken, a fraternity brother of a guy who quickly became a White House advisor to President Ford. He was a career Foreign Service officer who knew that upon departure from Sierra Leone he would go into retirement. He wanted to avoid that. So he tried to utilize his friendship to forestall or at least delay his replacement. That succeeded in delaying it for a few months, but in the end not to forestall it.

Q: Obviously you had been dealing with African affairs so you weren't a novice and you weren't a novice at the State Department, but before you went out—we are talking about the mid-70s— how were you prepared for the assignment? Was there a formal preparation or did you just talk to the Desk before departing?

SAMUELS: There was a good preparation. My wife and I were even given tutorial Krio language lessons. Krio is basically a separate language that developed over the years first as a Creole and later became a Krio language.

Q: It has no relation with the Creole of Haiti?

SAMUELS: It is a separate language although there may be similarities in the way in which it evolved. We were given intensive language training which frankly turned out to be very useful image-wise for us in Sierra Leone. There was a guy by the name of John Collier, who I think is still at FSI, who put on a special Sierra Leone seminar one day where they brought in Sierra Leone specialists from around the country—academics, people in the government who knew something about Sierra Leone. That was a normal ambassadorial course. I also spent a lot of time going around visiting relevant offices in

the US government that had a Sierra Leone interest. So I was pretty well prepared. As you can tell, I had a long time to prepare.

Q: Yes. When you went out there what did you perceive to be American interests in Sierra Leone?

SAMUELS: At the time there was a process of identifying those interests. Every year we went through an exercise that listed our interests there. It was clear that the number one interest in Sierra Leone was not to be accused of being involved in their domestic affairs.

Q: What was the political/cultural situation in Sierra Leone at the time that we had to avoid getting involved in?

SAMUELS: Well, in the late '60s there had been coups and counter coups, elected government changed leadership, a military coup to keep them from coming into power, radical movements of one kind or another. At one point two events led to a tense relationship between the US and the government of Sierra Leone. One was the PNGing of a guy in our...

Q: PNG means to declare persona non grata.

SAMUELS: Exactly, meaning that the government wanted out of their country one of our diplomats who was accused of intelligence activities and eventually he was removed. About the same time there were protests against our Embassy which led to mobs attacking its facade, if nothing else, and ripping down the U.S. flag. Relations were tense for some time. In fact, when I came in there were a lot of threats against the Peace Corps, which was our largest presence in the country, and one of my goals was at least to neutralize, if not win over, the leader of the kind of anti-Peace Corps movement, because anti-Peace Corps became a kind of symbolic anti-US effort.

The leader of that at the time was Vice President of Sierra Leone, a man named S. I. Cariama. I spent a lot of time with him trying to win him over. I think I was pretty successful.

Q: Often these anti-US movements are just designed for purely political purposes internally. You have to have an enemy, we are not immune from this ourselves. Was there any justification, looking back subjectively, for this anti-American and focus on the Peace Corps situation?

SAMUELS: I am not in a position to answer that question because the events that were utilized to justify this so-called anti-Americanism were events that took place quite some time before I arrived. I was just the recipient of the atmosphere. The relative ease with which that atmosphere was able to be molded gave me the feeling that if there had been justification back then it was easy to move on to the next phase in the relationship. In fact, I believe that trying to move on to the next phase in the relationship, which was part of my responsibility, coincided with the desire of the strong President, Siaka Stevens, to improve relations with the United States for his own purposes. They utilized both my youth (34), as a sign of the rejuvenation of the relationship, and the fact that I was a non-career ambassador, the first one they had ever had, as a sign that the political scene in the US was beginning to focus on Sierra Leone.

Well, that obviously wasn't true, but there was no reason why we shouldn't utilize that to improve relations. After all, Sierra Leone was not a big piece of our African policy, but nonetheless it wasn't useful to have tension in a relationship with any country when it wasn't justified.

Q: When you arrived there, what was the political situation?

SAMUELS: There was a President and a Vice President. It was an elected government. At the time, there was an elected opposition but, during the time of my stay there, they

evolved into a one party system utilizing the Zambian scheme as the appropriate model to follow. There had been a series of pretended coups. At the time I arrived there had been jailings, trials and some death sentences for coup-plotters. Some of the opposition were forced into exile. There were claims of dictatorial government that were common. Some of the strong opposition found its way in both the UK and US, but frankly much of what took place took place off the front pages and out of anyone's ability to analyze so not too much was known about the opposition.

Q: What was the U.K. connection there at that time? Was it still quite strong?

SAMUELS: Not really. Obviously there was a UK High Commissioner, but the U.K. tended to send older people down who were tired. At one point they had a guy down there as High Commissioner who didn't want to be there. He was a Arabist who felt that somehow he was being given penance by being assigned out there and that kind of attitude showed to the Africans. They had some aid program, but basically the U.K. was more a stopping place for Sierra Leoneans who were either in exile or were going on trips, and they would always go through there. But they were not an important factor in local affairs.

Q: I assume they had a military of some sort?

SAMUELS: There was a military. It had been responsible for past coups. President Stevens was very wary of the military. In fact, up to the time I arrived, there had been a long delay in any contact between US Defense Attach#s then resident in Monrovia, Liberia, and the military in Sierra Leone. One of the “accomplishments” of my tenure was to develop a dialogue between the US military and the Sierra Leone military. Stevens was reported to have restricted the military access to both guns and ammunition and it was known that his Party, the All Peoples Congress (APC), was, itself, armed with enough equipment to be able to give the army a bit of a battle if necessary. And some people felt that, in certain ways, the APC was better armed than the military. It was a military that was present and had a good marching capability, showing up for parades, etc, but it wasn't

very well armed. They had two naval vessels for patrolling their shores, and it was widely suspected that they had no one who could really sail them.

Q: So there was no drive to equip this military on the part of the United States?

SAMUELS: We had no relations with them.

Q: Did any other, the British, the French, the Soviets, get involved?

SAMUELS: The Cubans. There were Cuban advisors around but they were not a significant factor. Stevens would not allow it to become an important factor. He kept it constrained. It is current to note, in passing, that the current President of Sierra Leone, Joseph Momoh, was, at the time, head of the army. Stevens evolved him from being head of the army into being someone who could be accepted by a civilian system. That is symbolic of how Stevens kept him tied with the civilian system. In fact, at some point, he was given a place in the Parliament. There were places that were given to the head of the army, the police, and a few others like that.

Q: Were your dealings mostly with the Foreign Ministry or did you see the President mainly? Where were your connections?

SAMUELS: My connections were everywhere. I had connection with almost every minister. I traveled to the constituency of most of the ministers, with them. I had access to President Stevens almost anytime I wanted it. The Foreign Ministry had no ability to constrain any kind of informal contact I wanted to have. It was a funny place. If one were gregarious, it would have been simple to have contacts with Cabinet level people. I was gregarious, and my wife and I did a lot of entertaining at that level. In fact, I knew the whereabouts of most of them most of the time because it was such a transparent society. At any given night, if I were interested in finding a Cabinet member, I just had to go to one of the casinos in town and chances were good that you would run into one of the Cabinet members.

Q: Were there any issues that came up outside of your trying not to be accused of interfering?

SAMUELS: There were a few problems that came up that I might pass on. I can think of three in particular.

Even before I presented my credentials I received instructions from the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Nat Davis, to express concern to the Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, Desmond Luke for his behavior critical of Davis. I think it was related to the Allende affair because Davis had been Ambassador to Chile at the time. At an OAU Foreign Ministers meeting at Kinshasa, Luke had been critical of Davis, and I was given instructions to express our strong disapproval of that behavior even before I presented my credentials. In passing I would note that that was probably the single most difficult assignment I ever received because I didn't like Nat Davis. He had been a man who had given me a lot of trouble when he was Director General of the Foreign Service and when I was working for Kenneth Rush. Nonetheless, I had to carry through that assignment even though I knew it would make my own assignment in Sierra Leone more difficult. It was the hardest thing to carry out I ever had.

Q: How was this received?

SAMUELS: I don't remember that. Subsequently Luke quit being Foreign Minister and went on to be a lawyer/businessman and became a friend. Now I understand that he has an eye out to becoming President of Sierra Leone assuming that they are going to open up their system to a more democratic approach.

Q: You were saying there were three major problems. One was having to make this protest, what were the others?

SAMUELS: The second one was a fascinating little diplomatic vignette that was lost on the world and probably of little importance but was fascinating. During the time I was there one

or both of the Koreas were spending a tremendous amount of energy and money trying to win friends and converts on the African continent. At the time I arrived there was a North Korean diplomatic presence in Sierra Leone. Shortly after I came, the Sierra Leoneans committed themselves to accepting a South Korean presence as well. It would have been the first country in Africa, I believe, that would have had diplomatic relations and presence from both Koreas.

Well, in due course, a South Korean arrived to be the first South Korean Ambassador. He called on me even before he presented his credentials. He was a nice man by the name Lee.

One day I was called to the State House, where the President had his office, by President Stevens who asked for my help. The story that emerged was the following.

Ambassador-designate Lee had been picked up by the Presidential limousine as was normal for the presentation of credentials; was driven to the State House; was greeted outside of the State House by the normal buglers blowing whatever it was they blew to welcome such a person; was greeted at the front door by the Foreign Minister who then ushered him to a waiting room off the side, which was normal, where he sat and sat. He was visited by the Foreign Minister who asked him to please excuse the delay, something had come up but they would be with him shortly. And he sat and sat. The Chief of Protocol came out and said, “We are very sorry, Mr. Ambassador, but something has come up and we will not be able to go through with the presentation ceremony today. We are sorry about any kind of inconvenience.”

It was then that President Stevens called me in and said basically that he had a big problem. The North Koreans had been very active, which I have to assume means they paid some people, in his Cabinet, and he had a big problem with his Cabinet and could not go forward with the receiving of the credentials of the South Korean Ambassador. It was a domestic problem that he had to deal with and he intended to deal with it. He gave me his

word as President and a friend that he would, indeed, accept the credentials of this man because he had made a commitment to do that, but he had a domestic problem that he had to work out. He was telling me because he knew how close the US was with South Korea, and also because he needed my help.

He needed my help over the coming weeks and months to call on his Cabinet members, and he named a few, who were potential trouble makers on this issue, explaining to them how important it was to the United States and to the improvement of the relations between Sierra Leone and the United States, something both President Stevens and I were committed to, for the Sierra Leoneans to go forward with their commitment to South Korea. He wanted me to do that for a while and then he would accept the credentials of the South Korean.

So I suspect I reported that back to Washington, I don't recall exactly what or how much I reported. My memory tells me that Washington didn't take it very seriously. At no time was I given instructions to do or not to do something. So I played that little vignette out in Sierra Leone and in a reasonable time frame the South Korean Ambassador's credentials were accepted and we then had ambassadors from both countries.

Q: Did you get together with the South Korean and tell him what the problem was?

SAMUELS: He had no idea what it was. It was beyond his control. Both of the Koreas were willing to utilize their own revenues to do whatever they needed to do in countries in Africa. At the time it related to support on Korea related issues in the non-aligned movement or wherever. If you look back in the newspapers in Sierra Leone of those days they were half filled with news and advertising about the Koreas. You thought you were in the wrong part of geography. Because they would take out two or four full-page ads about Korea. In that way they would kind of buy the editors and publishers of the newspapers who needed that revenue.

Q: They could then probably display back home their efforts.

SAMUELS: Exactly.

Q: You mentioned one other issue.

SAMUELS: I did. I am trying to remember what it was.

Q: Well, we can go on. You mentioned the Peace Corps.

SAMUELS: We had a couple of hundred people there from time to time. Most of them were doing either teaching or swamp rice production. It was a good program.

Q: Looking at this from a practical side, it has often been said that the main benefit of the Peace Corps is that it is good for our potential leaders to get out there and do this work and come back with knowledge of how the other half live. What was its effect in Sierra Leone?

SAMUELS: Well, the first thing I would say is that it was the biggest single sign that the US was trying to work with Sierra Leone to resolve its problems. Therefore, it was the biggest single bona fide that we had in our bilateral relationship. I do think it was helpful for those people who were in it...helpful to have those people back home, kind of salt and peppering American communities that by nature might have been more isolationist than they would be with returned Peace Corps volunteers within them. But, on the ground in Sierra Leone, it was an important piece of our diplomatic presence.

Now what about in terms of Sierra Leone's development? It is much harder to measure, but my own view is that if countries are not able to get their own act together, the opportunities that are presented by Peace Corps volunteers and the work of Peace Corps volunteers are likely to go close to for naught. In the case of those who did rice production, without that being a more vital part of the Sierra Leone agricultural policy—of the extension

policy, the pricing policy for agriculture, the import policies, it would be insufficient, and basically Sierra Leone didn't have the right policies. Had they had the right policies, what we did would have been quite significant, and it would have been a mistake not to have gone forward with it. I don't know the current state of the Sierra Leone Peace Corps program. I hope we are still doing it, because Sierra Leone is a potential exporter of rice.

In terms of teachers? I happen to think that it is useful for (and here I speak as someone who spent two years as a teacher in Africa and therefore am a bit prejudiced) Americans to be in classrooms in foreign countries because basically we are likely to be good teachers, creative teachers, and it is useful for the next generation of Sierra Leoneans, in this case, to have had positive experiences with Americans.

Q: Do we have any AID programs there?

SAMUELS: At the time I arrived we didn't have an AID program. One of the things I feel I accomplished was to recreate an AID program. There had been an AID program in the '60s, but that died with that exercise of flag burning that I described previously. I got Sierra Leone back in the good graces to create an AID program, and a few things were started. To the best of my knowledge they have been carried on. By AID program I mean something other than Food for Peace. The PL 480 program, as you know, is first and foremost a sales program for US agricultural goods and therefore, I am less willing to use it as an example of an AID program. There had been a small PL 480 program that had continued, but we went beyond that during my day, and I think there has been some continuation, although Sierra Leone hasn't behaved in their own policies sufficient to justify a more creative and larger AID program than it has received.

Q: We got involved with two neighbors of Sierra Leone—Guinea and Liberia. Did this cause any particular problems in Sierra Leone?

SAMUELS: At the time there was a Sekou Toure government in Guinea that was closed and was harsh on its own population, so you frequently found Guineans seeking refuge

in Sierra Leone. People from Guinea would try to come across the border to buy things in Sierra Leone where more stuff was available. The diplomatic corps came across to buy things in Sierra Leone. Many of the petty tradesmen in Sierra Leone were really Guineans plying their trade. For example, almost all the tailors were from Guinea.

In the case of Liberia, there wasn't much of importance while I was there. There was the first bridge across the Mano River that separated Liberia and Sierra Leone. That was built in hopes of expanding commerce and communication, but there really wasn't a lot of contact except for the kind of rural bush traffic across borders that didn't have much meaning. But in terms of one's interference in the other's affairs not very much. There was a direct relationship between President Stevens and then President Tolbert in Liberia, and there were rumors of joint ventures of one kind of another, particularly fisheries, but nothing very much.

Q: What about the United Nations votes?

SAMUELS: You have put your finger on the third issue. That issue had the effect indirectly of redirecting my own career. Much of the good relations that I was able to develop with the Sierra Leone government was utilized by the US government in relation to votes in the UN. Usually votes related to Puerto Rico, or Guam or American Samoa. I don't recall, but my guess is that at best the Sierra Leoneans probably abstained. In retrospect one wonders whether they were of sufficient importance for us to expend all the energy expended in trying to get people to take seriously our concerns about UN votes on those areas.

Q: What were the basic problems?

SAMUELS: I am sure it was a colonialism issue but I haven't a vague idea now.

Q: Well, these things kept surfacing in the UN...that we were being a colonial power in Guam or Puerto Rico.

SAMUELS: There were these votes that came in the special committee on colonialism, or whatever it was called. And frankly it was really hard to do. I would sometimes get these urgent messages to wake up the Foreign Minister to make sure that he focused on the importance of their UN vote for the overall U.S.- Sierra Leone relationship. I even talked several times to President Stevens about Puerto Rico and Guam. The reason for that, and this might be of some significance, was that there was constant concern in Washington that the Sierra Leone ambassador to the UN, like many ambassadors from small countries to the UN, was acting without due regard for the overall effect of a small vote on the relations between his country and the United States. On votes like this, there were no instructions from capital; the assignment that I, as ambassador in capital, was getting was an assignment to try to see to it that some instructions went out.

Frequently, there would develop in New York, and here I only know from hearsay, a kind of sociology of Third Worldism that would lead to a kind of steamrolling on a variety of votes. Our goal would be to try to break apart that steamroll in some way. The best way you could do that was by getting some kind of instruction from capital to the representative in New York.

I don't remember how successful we were, but I do remember, and here is where I say it affected the direction of my own life, that if you tie those UN goals with the way by which the US went about trying to set up an AID program, which was to be concerned about the basic human needs of Sierra Leone, I was able to contrast the efforts that I was doing in Sierra Leone with the efforts, for example, of my British, French and German colleagues, all of whom were out there selling products that their country was exporting. My mandate at no time involved selling anything in terms of US exports.

I remember one day opening up a Sierra Leone newspaper and seeing a big headline which said something to the effect..."Big New German Aid Program For Sierra Leone." When you read the article, basically it described a German government credit to allow the

Sierra Leoneans to buy Mercedes buses. I realized that we would never have that kind of headline related to the United States.

When I returned, left government service and went to the Center for Strategic and International Studies to head up the Third World Studies program there, one of the areas that I started to look at had to do with US export policy towards third world countries, with an eye towards seeing the extent to which US paid attention to how competitive it was in those countries with our fellow industrial democracies. The impetus for doing that began with that headline about the German aid program. As a result, of that I got involved with US export policy generally and this expanded into my doing some writing on US export competitiveness.

In fact, I like to feel that I was a decade or so ahead of other Americans in trying to focus on US export competitiveness in the late '70s. I even had a big project at CSIS on US export competitiveness back in those days. That led to my next job which led to my next job as Ambassador to the GATT. All that resulted from that German headline and those instructions on Puerto Rico and Guam which I found ludicrous.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Bureau and the Department? Did you pretty much call your own shots, other than the UN? Was there any particular micromanagement or anything like that?

SAMUELS: No. For the most part the Bureau didn't pay much attention to what I was doing. I think they were satisfied with what we were doing and how we were doing it. When my DCM was leaving to be reassigned, I was given a group of potential replacements. I didn't want any of those. I asked for another set of names and didn't want any of those. I tried to find my own and picked a guy who I thought would be absolutely perfect for the position and offered him it. But showing the brilliance of Ray Seitz, who is now our Ambassador to the UK, he said he didn't want the job. Eventually in the third batch they

sent out there was one I chose. He subsequently went on to being our first ambassador to Djibouti.

There was very little micromanagement. Relations were good I think.

Q: How did you find your staff at the Embassy?

SAMUELS: Generally speaking reasonably good. Hard working. When I first went there we had a very bright young junior officer, in his first assignment, who tripled as the consular, economic, commercial officer. He went on to have a good career. He is now ambassador in the OECD. The youngest career ambassador I think we have ever had in OECD. They were good people, I think.

My general view is that in places like that young officers tend to do well because they have a lot of energy and you need a lot of energy in order to do well.

Q: Before we move to your GATT business, is there anything else we might cover here?

SAMUELS: I do remember one interesting thing. During the period I was in Sierra Leone, which you recall was early 1975 until mid 1977...actually there are two things...one related to Angola. At the time there was a lot of activity going on in Angola.

Q: That was one place that Secretary Kissinger was paying attention to in Africa.

SAMUELS: That is right. And it is interesting to note that of all the people in the Department at the time there were few who were as knowledgeable about Angola as I was. I had written my doctoral thesis on it. I went to the office every day expecting to receive some query about my views or some request that I come back and consult on Angola, but it never happened. That was a disappointment on my part. I didn't raise my flag which, I guess, I could have done.

Q: But that is very typical. Once you have departed from one scene...there is practically no collective memory. Probably nobody knew.

SAMUELS: Even when there was a key moment where Sierra Leone was a key player. Here my dates are not very good so you will have to excuse me. It was when there was a vote scheduled at the OAU as to which of two parties would be supported by the OAU, either the MPLA, which was at that time supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, or UNITA, which was supported by us and South Africa. The vote was even. Sierra Leone was one of those potential swing votes. The Nigerians were on the side of the MPLA, largely I believe because of the South African connection on the other side. The Nigerians at that time were willing to utilize their oil revenues for diplomatic end. I think it was during the Presidency of Obasanjo. They sent a Nigerian government plane around West Africa, and particularly to Sierra Leone.

There were rumors that money was in cash form in briefcases. There was a clear indication that bribery was in the works in order to get Sierra Leone to vote on the Nigerian side of that issue. President Stevens did call on me and did tell me of his dilemma. He gave me a chance to put my oar in in some fashion.

As I recall there were some efforts on my part to try to get greater attention paid to this on the part of Washington. And, if I am not mistaken, Washington ignored it. In the end I was unable to present a message from Kissinger or Ford on the subject, and Sierra Leone voted on the other side of the issue. I recall one or two phone calls from President Stevens to me at my residence urging me to do something and my inability to get Washington to take this seriously. In fact, it makes me want to look back into this and recall the details a little better.

Q: One does wonder why? This was not a minor issue. Of all the issues dealing with Africa, this was about the only one that Kissinger focused on and when he focused on something things usually got done.

SAMUELS: That is right. In retrospect, it was a badly conceived policy. We had an opportunity to keep the OAU from choosing sides, because the OAU started out not wanting to choose sides. It was we and/or the Russians who forced that choice. We would have been better off to have strengthened the OAU's ability to keep a choice from having been made, and we did not take that position. It was a mistake.

Q: Before we leave Sierra Leone, did...

SAMUELS: There was another issue that is probably worth calling to your attention because it was one that both gave me an opportunity to exercise that policy priority that I had mentioned earlier and at the same time lengthen my tenure in Sierra Leone.

In early 1977, I believe, perhaps before the Carter Administration came into power, there was rioting and strikes in Sierra Leone. Up until that time Stevens had been able to curtail such events for a long period of time. There were rumors of a coup. There was a major strike and unrest at the university, which in Sierra Leone is physically located on a mountain overlooking the capital and therefore could be cut off by closing the road up the mountain. President Stevens' party, the APC, was very identifiable when it wanted to be. They always wore red shirts and carried red flags. They were a bit of an anti-intellectual group and there was a certain tension between the ivory tower university and the students who were there and the political party, the APC.

The tension was building up. It so happened that it developed approximately a week after I delivered a graduation speech at another educational institution, a teacher training college, on the outskirts of Freetown, a place called Milton Margai College, named after one of the early Sierra Leonean leaders. The principal of that college happened to have been a Sierra Leonean with whom I had done graduate work and whom I knew, therefore, quite well.

My speech there was an unusually candid one for a foreign representative of any kind, in that it identified serious shortcomings in the Sierra Leonean educational scene with the precision of a trained educator, which I was and which many in Sierra Leone knew that I was. It was a speech that I knew would get unusual circulation. I had made it a point of giving copies of it ahead of time both to the Minister of Education and to President Stevens, himself, because I knew it would be a significant speech. The speech was done with an effort not just to be critical, but really to be helpful.

Could it have been done in another way to be helpful? Perhaps, but I wanted to do it this way. I knew I was on my way out, and I wanted to leave a little mark in a way that I thought could help Sierra Leone...shake it out of its educational doldrums. It was a country with a long tradition of educational excellence. That college up on the mountain had been the first university in West Africa and had, itself, trained the leaders of the governments of Nigeria and Ghana back in an earlier day.

There were some who felt there was a direct connection between my speech and the growth of unrest that took place at the university. At that point my entire stance changed. I had been a very involved ambassador. I had spent a lot of time with Ministers. At that point, which was toward the end of my tenure anyhow, I started to take tennis lessons. I went to the club and spent a lot of time on the tennis court. I would fly my flag wherever I went, particularly when I went to tennis lessons. I needed to make sure that somehow the US didn't get accused of involvement with this problem which was exclusively a domestic Sierra Leone one.

I didn't want the re-creation of the problem that had happened in the '60s. Of course, there was some talk. There were rumors of my being here, there and the other place. But I really had constrained my activities and made it a point of letting everyone know where I was so that it couldn't be misconstrued that I had gone somewhere else.

I think I was successful, although I have to tell you that I run into Sierra Leoneans now who were students at the college and remind me of those days because they remember that speech that I gave. I think it may have been a factor in spurring them to do whatever it is they wanted to do. And that really hadn't been my intention.

It also had the affect of extending my stay in Sierra Leone. When the Carter Administration people came into power they sent to the remaining political ambassadors, of which I was one, a telegram that basically said, “Go home as soon as possible.” It forgot to say, “Thank you for your service.” The whole exercise was such that I almost wrote an op-ed piece to be titled “The impossibility of leaving the US government with grace.”

I had already begun a dialogue with the African Bureau at the time, trying to figure out the most appropriate time for me to leave, because as a result of this tension in Sierra Leone, Stevens had committed himself to an election which was to be held in May, 1977. I argued that it made sense for me to leave just after the election so that the new ambassador would come when the new government came in so there wasn't a sign that somehow I was being asked to leave because of the problems that took place, but rather that my departure was a normal movement in the US tradition and it would coincide with a whole new government in Sierra Leone.

The African Bureau agreed, but the problem was trying to get the Director General side of the Department, which was somehow connected with the political side of things by then, to buy into the policy side of the Department. We had to develop links that did not automatically exist within the Department in Washington. Eventually that was done and I was allowed to stay until the appropriate time for me to leave, which was after the election in May, 1977 took place, and there was a normal transition.

Q: You mentioned that when you returned to the US you were in CSIS dealing with third world studies. From 1986-89 you were Ambassador to GATT. How did that come about?

SAMUELS: Well, I was at CSIS as executive director for third world studies from 1977-1981, and then I went to the US Chamber of Commerce as Vice President, International. That is a job I was recruited for by some who were aware of my growing specialization on US export policy. I held that job for about five years. In the course of that time I got to know a guy named Clayton Yeutter, who was at the time head of Mercantile Exchange in Chicago and was involved in some of the activities we were doing in the US Chamber of Commerce. After he was asked by President Reagan in the summer of 1985 to become his US Trade Representative, he subsequently asked me if I wanted to be his deputy in Geneva. I took that job and became the Ambassador to GATT.

Q: What was your main focus while you were at GATT? What were you trying to accomplish?

SAMUELS: I went to the GATT after there had been a decision to try to launch a new round of trade negotiations. When I went there in early 1986, there was developing a Geneva based exercise called a Preparatory Committee (known as the PREPCOM), which was to try to devise the terms under which a new multilateral round of trade negotiations would take place. We worked in Geneva through the late winter, spring and summer of 1986 preparing for a meeting of trade ministers in Punta del Este, Uruguay that took place in September, 1986. It eventually launched what has since been known as the Uruguay Round.

Besides working towards that launch, being present at the launch, I also headed the US representation to the Uruguay Round in Geneva, for the first half of the negotiation until the completion of the mid-term review in May, 1989.

My job, also, was to represent the US in the continuing exercise of our GATT obligations and rights in Geneva. There is a monthly meeting of something known as the GATT Council which oversees how countries are behaving in terms of their current GATT

obligations. My job was to lead the US representation in the GATT Council and in the preparation for those monthly meetings.

Q: The Reagan Administration was in its second term and often it is easier on the international side to represent the United States when an administration is sort of settled in, has learned the ropes and is no longer driven by ideology, etc. Did you find that there was a good solid coherent policy?

SAMUELS: For the most part the policy that we pursued in the GATT was coherent. There is an interagency group that developed instructions. The job of US Trade Representative is to create a single policy related to trade and to negotiate from that policy. I believe that was the case. Congress had its own views of what trade policy ought to be and at times that undermined what it was we were trying to do, but my instructions were usually clear.

There were certain frustrations about being in the job that had to do with an unwillingness in Washington, particularly USTR, to let those of us outside of Washington run with the policy. There was a tremendous amount of micromanagement and that was a function of some of the personalities involved back in Washington.

The job in Geneva was not without its frustrations, but many of them were human rather than policy.

Q: Who were the major problem players from our point of view?

SAMUELS: At the GATT, the major problem players at the time I was there, were largely India and Brazil, who were naysayers in efforts to expand multilateralism and liberalize the trading system. Of those, the Indians I felt were endemic naysayers—constant problems. There was some hope with Brazil, with some changes of personalities on their side, that there would be a change, and there has been a bit. Some tell me that the Indians have changed, but I find that hard to believe.

The EC, of course, was always a problem, because we always had tensions with the EC. But they were also allies, and problems of multilateral negotiations are such that one has to be very careful of identifying a particular side as an enemy one day because they become an ally the next.

Another kind of interesting vignette that might be lost has to do with the unique nature of the position I held in Geneva. In my ambassadorship in Geneva I was, I believe, the only resident US Ambassador abroad who did not report to or through the Secretary of State. Not only that, but the position is that of the only resident US Ambassador abroad who is not confirmed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Confirmation of that position goes through the Senate Finance Committee and the allegiance of that position is to the US Trade Representative, who is a Cabinet member in his or her own right. The position is a dual position—Ambassador to the GATT and Deputy USTR, or rather, deputy to a Cabinet member. A very unusual position.

Q: Did this cause any troubles?

SAMUELS: Not during the period I was there, but there was at an earlier stage, tension between USTR and State over the independence of the position of USTR in Geneva and over who would sign a cable going out from Geneva. Eventually it was won by USTR, so cable traffic related to USTR business went out over the signature of the Ambassador to the GATT, rather than the Ambassador to the UN organizations in Geneva who was widely viewed as the senior ambassador there.

Q: Did you find that this caused you to draw upon some of your diplomatic skills to keep the relations intact?

SAMUELS: Occasionally so, because it was clear that the substantive job was mine. There were also some interesting substantive responsibilities related to arms control that

didn't really fall under the ambassador to the UN organizations, but I never had much to do with those.

Q: In the GATT were their any particular issues that became a bone of contention?

SAMUELS: One of the major reasons we wanted to start the Uruguay Round of negotiation was to expand the coverage of the multilateral trading system. At the time there were constant cries in the Congress and in a variety of places that discussed trade policy that referred to an uneven playing field, “a lack of a level playing field”. I think those of us who really understood trade and multilateral trade realized that that was not a sufficient description of what some of the problems were. A lot of the problems related not to the levelness of the playing field, rather the breadth of the field.

In fact, the GATT, the embodiment of the multilateral trade understandings that we had, was itself constrained by what its coverage was. It didn't cover any of the trade in services that exists—insurance, financial insurance, tourism, legal practitioners and a variety of things like that. It had no ability to bring trade related intellectual property, copyrights and patents, into coverage by a multilateral agreement. It had no meaningful set of rules related to trade related investment issues, by which I mean things like the use of domestic content, or forced export of goods that are produced by foreign investors. All these were things that were not covered at all.

Q: And yet they have become increasingly an important factor.

SAMUELS: Absolutely. Basically, a major problem with the GATT resulted from the way that it was set up. If you go back to the period when the GATT was set up after World War II, it is important to remember that the GATT exists largely as a result of a failure, not as a result of a success. After World War II, as part of the Bretton Woods exercise, there was a desire to set up three different organizations. The World Bank, that was set up; an International Monetary Fund, that was set up; and an international trade organization, that was not set up. One was created, there were negotiations for it. It was basically intended

to be much broader in its assessment and coverage than what eventually came about. It wasn't set up because the US Senate made it clear to President Truman that it would not approve US participation in what had been negotiated by the US. So it was never submitted to the Congress.

What was then set up was a General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which had been viewed as an interim step to the creation of the international trade organization. Then there was a set of meetings to try to implement that interim agreement. In fact, there is no GATT as an “organization”. It is merely a secretariat to the contracting parties to the agreement. All that was as a result of a failure.

When we were talking about how ineffective the GATT was or how it didn't cover a whole range of issues, we often forgot that we were largely at fault for that. To some extent, the Uruguay Round is an effort to recreate in modern terms some of the shortcomings of a system that wasn't able to get off the ground largely as a result of the US.

Q: I know we have to wind this up, but one last question. Looking at it now from outside, at the time you were dealing with it, could you comment a bit on the strengths and weaknesses of the United States in negotiating and dealing with an organization such as this?

SAMUELS: That is a tough question which is probably worth a seminar with several people piping in their own views. Let me start off by saying that the shibboleth that one hears frequently in the United States, a bit of a chest beating, that those other guys are better negotiators on trade issues than we are, is just not so.

The fact is that the US has a good group of trade negotiators, long experienced, that will match what foreigners have any day. The fact is that in both USTR and Commerce, in particular, we have a lot of people with a lot of tenure who have been around for a long period of time.

When people say, “Well, but our Cabinet members change so frequently,” frankly so does practically every other country's cabinet members. In fact, the Japanese Trade Ministers, who people say have been around much longer than we, change more frequently than almost any other country's. EC ministers change. Sure bureaucrats often stay the same, but so do they in our country. One could look right now, this is in 1991, at who the people are who are negotiating the Uruguay Round at the end, and the US has probably the most experienced group of negotiators amongst all the countries doing the negotiating. This calls into question people's assessments.

Q: Okay. I want to thank you very much.

SAMUELS: You are very welcome.

End of interview